

*The genuine Fear of God the best Foundation  
of private and national Happiness.*

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A  
S E R M O N

Preached at the

PARISH CHURCH

O F

St. *PETER*, in the *EAST*,

I N

*O X F O R D*,

On *Friday, Febr. 17. 1758.*

Being the Day appointed by Royal Proclamation  
to be kept as a *GENERAL FAST.*

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By *JAMES SNOWDON D.D.*

Fellow of *Merton College*,  
And Minister of the said Parish.

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*O X F O R D*,

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*He will fulfill the desire of them that  
fear him : —*

**T**HE thirst after happiness is so constantly and so universally fixed in human nature, that there is no age or condition of life, which can, or indeed attempts to plead an utter exemption from it. The new born Infant by its cries very significantly utters its want of it; and as we make further advances in the track of Being, we daily, I had almost said hourly, give intimations of the same disposition, often without the least *direct* design of doing so; and if we examine those, whose lot it is to perform a complete round of existence here, by arriving at the utmost verge of that old Age, which for its resemblance in several particulars to the *first*, is stiled the second childhood, we shall find that the point, now before us, is one of the instances wherein the similitude between them subsists. If we take the scene of life in another view, not considering the various periods, but the different ranks and stations of it, it will doubtless appear that the pursuit of happiness closely interweaves itself with each of them. Altho' He that followeth

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the plough is (according to the wise son of Sirach, *Eccl.* Ch. 38. v. 25.) ordinarily excluded from the attainment of knowledge, yet he is allowed to be a very fair Candidate for this Blessing, and accordingly He puts in his claim to, and often really possesses as much or more of it than many, who might think, that they themselves had a far more probable prospect of it; as therefore the lowest member of society is not too low for pretensions of this kind, so neither if we pass thro' all the intermediate stages to the highest, shall we perceive any that can justly say they are above them. He that is arrayed in purple and fine linnen, and may fare sumptuously every day, is notwithstanding admitted to have very reasonable cares and pursuits of this sort, altho' He may be at present Master of every necessary and convenience, which his situation calls for. From this view of the matter therefore it should seem that the sentiment was one and the same in all, altho' the language in which it is expressed, or the several methods by which it discovers itself to others may be somewhat different, according to the different age or rank, or *both* age and rank of the Persons, in whom it resides.

Here then a Question may naturally arise, — *viz.* — what is the precise notion of this happiness which is such a universal attractive to all mankind? To which I fancy a succinct and general, altho', I hope, as far as it goes, — a clear answer may be given by saying, — that all objects whatsoever, which we have or can have any concern



cern with, divide themselves into two great classes of *good* and *evil*: by the former we mean such things as conduce to the preservation or convenience of our Being ; by the latter those, which have the contrary effects. We know likewise, that we all have appetites and aversions implanted in us, adapted to these qualities in things, by means of which we have a tendency to, or are carried towards the one, and endeavor to shun and entirely escape the other. When therefore we are overtaken by and suffer under these latter, this constitutes misery; and when we obtain the former, we gratify our appetite for good or *fulfill our desire*, and this forms what we mean by happiness. And if every *just* and *well-grounded* desire should be *immediately* fulfill'd, as soon as it springs up in the soul, this would establish complete and perfect happiness. But this is far from being the present case, — for we all of us may readily perceive, that *to desire* and *to have* are not words of the same or nearly of the same import. — Experience will tell us, that most frequently a variety of methods are to be employed for the obtaining of good, and when we have pitched upon and exerted those, which upon the whole will be allowed to be the most fair and probable, yet the gratification of our desire is by no means in all cases the necessary consequence of our doing so. Reason also will give us shrewd hints, and Revelation will demonstrate, that the Almighty Being, who formed, presides over the Universe, and altho' He permits for the most

part, what we call, a *natural* course of things, yet still, by a superlative wisdom, He can justly claim all events as the issues of his providence. In every transaction therefore it shou'd be our first care to make him our friend, if we aim to lay the most legitimate foundation for success; especially when He so expressly declares (as He hath done in my Text) — that *He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him.*

From this deduction then I hope it may appear, that the Sentence prefixed to this Discourse, (and which I have this moment repeated) is of the utmost importance to us, and especially befitting this season, when we are assembled in the most solemn manner to implore the divine protection against our very subtil and dangerous Enemy. In proportion therefore to its importance and propriety it certainly behoves us to guard against any misapprehension of it, and likewise to retain it, when rightly qualified and understood, deeply imprinted upon our memories. To this end I must humbly solicit for a patient and attentive hearing, whilst I endeavor to unfold a little that genuine Fear of God, which is made the condition of this promise; whilst I bestow a few reflections upon the promise itself, and then conclude with some application of what may have been said, to the cause of the present Solemnity.

Fear is one of the most quick, strong and extensive passions in our nature: and altho' there are Persons, whose occupations tend to habituate them to danger, who can in a good measure



sure divest themselves of it, and may very laudably do so, as far as their profession requires; yet still we all must readily allow, that it may, in general, be very rationally entertained to a certain degree. For Fear is an uneasy sensation at the prospect of approaching Evil; and as Evils abound, and are perhaps commonly of much greater moment to destroy satisfaction, than their opposite Goods are to create and preserve it, hence as we every one of us covet satisfaction, (which is but another term for happiness,) we may also admit a fear of that evil, which we perceive will prevent our obtaining it, or rob us of it. When the power from whence it is to proceed is material and inanimate, or if animated, irrational or corrupt and wicked, then we are to dread the evil of Pain, but if it is intellectual, completely just, and omniscient, then in the way of prevention or in case of actual offence we are to be apprehensive of the evil of Punishment. These last Qualities are Attributes of the Deity, and therefore it is this last evil, that we are solely or chiefly to fear from him; for vengeance is in a peculiar manner his and He will repay it to them, that despise or break his laws: and what renders this situation more terrible (if that can be,) is, that our own conscience shall conspire, with the positive inflictions that may be appointed by heaven, to torment us. For we are assured by truth itself, that, in such case, our *worm shall not die*, as well as that the *Fire*, (whatever that is,) *shall not be quenched*.

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But still it must be confessed that a Fear, which proceeds *simply* from a prospect of divine punishment, is to be accounted but a low acquisition, in the moral and religious view of it; for it is no more than the Devils themselves are replenished with, since St. *James* tells us (Ch. 2. ver. 19) that they believe and *tremble*. However it is much to be wished that many Christians were, I do not say, duly replenished with this Principle, but even were very moderately Partakers of it, since numbers are to be met with either in the gay or busy world, who seem scarce to betray the least signs of it; who give a loose to almost every passion, that they can without the immediate censure of human laws, and whose general conduct wou'd tempt us to suspect not only that they cared not for God, but also that he was not in all their thoughts, if their frequent taking his name into their mouths, in order to profane it by false and vain oaths, or by uttering senseless imprecations upon others and damnable ones upon themselves, did not prevent us from doing so. They almost affect to disclaim all other communication with the Deity, and make a sort of point of it, never to attend upon the Lord in the publick ordinances of Religion, or if they at any time by chance, or for fashion's sake do so, it is with such a misbecoming, thoughtless, and undaunted mein, that they shew forth not so much the worship and *fear*, as the defiance of him. To such therefore we might propose the example of even Satan himself, as worthy their imitation in this respect,

respect, hoping that as they have a capacity for, so they wou'd employ the disposition to a better use, than he does; and altho' this servile dread is by no means to be styled the *perfection*, yet it might in them be the *beginning* of religious wisdom; as it might, if duly cultivated, lead in its consequences to that Fear, which is a natural and close appendage to our most perfect virtue and piety here.

For to a Person deeply and seriously reflecting, (as doubtless the subject matter deserves) upon God's denunciation of eternal vengeance against obstinate wickedness, it may naturally occur to put this question to himself, — *viz.* why is an endless punishment awarded by heaven to the unrepented breach of its Laws? And to this one might think he wou'd as readily reply, or be carried to do so almost without any Admonitor, that, as God hath afforded to him almost innumerable instances of his goodness by the free gift of life, and a various profusion of means for the happy support of it here, which, at the lowest computation he may usually obtain to a very comfortable degree by his own industry, or charitable assistance (if that be necessary) from the superfluous store of others, so the same gracious Being hath given him a capacity for and an actual promise of an eternal existence in perfect happiness hereafter upon stated conditions, and therefore when he at the same time threatens an everlasting vengeance for the breach of them, the presumption certainly is, that even amidst this justice and judgment, the same plan of good-



goodness and mercy is still carried on. — Let him then proceed to consider the terms upon which this gracious promise is given, and he may with almost ever so little thought perceive that the negative part of them only aim to prevent the *excessive* or *perverted* use of those good things, which God hath given him richly to enjoy, that is, such a use of them as will scarce ever fail sooner or later upon the whole to produce misery even here; whilst the sum of the positive precepts is *to do good and to communicate*, these being the sacrifices with which God is well pleased, and *that* because they conduce to the present happiness of his creatures: and at the same time both one and the other are *natural qualifications* for their admission into that heaven, which he hath prepared for them hereafter. — What high Esteem then! what Veneration for and Gratitude to that best of Beings must offer itself to every serious and attentive mind upon such a view of the case; and if these are permitted to have their proper effect in it, how easily must they prescribe an habitual Fear of offending against so much goodness, not only in the greater and more flagrant instances, but in such as are so little or so secret as to render us perfectly secure from every other censure or inspection, but that of Omniscience.

Though the Point seems scarcely to require, yet let us assume an obvious illustration of it, which the Sacred Writings with their usual ease, dignity, and condescension will readily suggest to us; for in them we find, that the  
Deity



Deity styles himself the *Father* of his rational creatures, and hath taught us to follow his own example by calling him so too in our most solemn address to him. It is not my business, nor intention here to enter into all the minute proprieties of this appellation, as thus employed; it will be amply sufficient for my present purpose to induce you to join with me, and let us just image to ourselves a sensible, virtuous, and indulgent Parent, blest with a well-disposed, obedient, and grateful Offspring. Then let us take a view of the former, exerting his benevolence and power in an habitual and almost unremitted regard for the present and future happiness of his children, joying in their success, and sick'ning with grief at every blameable miscarriage of the same; after this let us behold the correspondent behavior of the latter, demonstrating itself, according to the qualifications already enumerated, by a most deep and affectionate veneration towards the Parent, and by a ready and unconstrained fear of causing any real displeasure to him, even in the most trivial instances, where there could be no self-interested views to influence their behaviour, but solely the desire of avoiding the present displeasure itself. — Let us again, by a very easy and common process of the mind, take off every weakness and infirmity from this parental character, which is incident to the very best of the human species, and then, upon the removal of these clouds, the Deity will break forth in most resplendent and amiable Majesty upon us, —

continually acting for, and rejoicing in the happiness of his creatures: and we must in consequence feel, (if we have hearts capable of any feeling,) the highest reverence for such a Being, and entertain an habitual fear of offending against such unlimited Goodness. The Disposition of mind must be the same towards the heavenly as the earthly Parent, only varied in its degree of intenseness, and I hope from hence we may very obviously discern, that there is a Fear as well as a Faith, that worketh by love, and which is to be the main ingredient of that qualification, to which the promise of the text is annexed.

But whilst I endeavour to set forth and commend this ingenuity of temper, and have made the *mere* dread of punishment to be only the beginning of wisdom to the profligate, yet let me not be misunderstood, as if I thought that we could ever arrive to such a perfection here, as to be able entirely to discard it. The admonition not to be *high-minded* but *fear*, even in this last sense of the word, will always be but too applicable to us in our present state. For here our best virtue is but weak, and we are liable to be thrown back from any supposed degree of it by manifold and strong temptations; the horror therefore of eternal vengeance is very fit to be placed as a guard or out-work to it, lest we shou'd at any time be overcome by the power or number of Assailants, whilst the other branch of this same quality will be continually urging us to make fresh and further advances in every  
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course of Goodness; and if they thus amicably unite, and co-operate with one another, they will constitute, together taken, that genuine Fear, the Possessor of which God hath promised to fulfill the desires of.

To this Promise therefore it may now be proper to pay some more attention. I have already observed in a cursory manner, that the fulfilling of the desires is an expression in sense the same, or very nearly so, to the conferring or giving of happiness, because all happiness is the completion of our desires, or something equivalent to it. It may indeed be said, that the possession of Good *unforeseen* and *unexpected* conveys real, and often more exquisite happiness for that very reason; but altho' in this case it cannot be *actually* desired by us, yet it must be in fact *desirable* to us, as being agreeable to our nature and disposition, or otherwise it will bestow no happiness upon us. But, waving these niceties, let us pass on to somewhat much more material to us in the present case, by considering that things have their qualities and nature, and their congruity or incongruity to ours, prior to, and in a good measure independent of our desires about them; it is therefore our business to endeavour to adapt these latter to the real moment and importance of the former, and to expect the divine bounty or concurrence for the fulfilling of them accordingly. Now this very *regulation* and *aim* of our desires the Fear of God, as above described, will in several respects be much subservient to, and, without such a management



of them, their gratification will in the end prove our disappointment, since, in such circumstances, it wou'd, upon the whole, be productive not of happiness, but misery.

In order then succinctly and clearly to discuss the point now properly before us, Let us in the first place seriously reflect a little upon the nature and extent of our Being and Existence, whether we are, at present, in all respects upon a level with the tribes of Brute Animals, and like them too, to perish, as tho' we had never been, at the dissolution of our corporeal frame; or, if we do not possess a great pre-eminence over them here, and at the same time likewise carry about with us a much more enduring substance, than they can boast of. As to our present excellence above the Brute Creation, there are few, I fancy, if any, who do not, in their own opinion, or even that of others, enjoy it; nay! as man is formed in the image of God, it would be almost impious to intimate the contrary: but as to our future continuance beyond them after the termination of this life, *there* it must be confessed, that the first appearances are against us, since we also die and are turned again to the dust in common with them. — However there has an opinion almost universally prevailed amongst mankind, that the whole of them does not move off from the stage of Being together with their Body, but that, on the contrary, the conscious thing within survives it; and that this notion is not a mere groundless prejudice, there is a good presumption from considering

sidering how each person, the more pious, thoughtful and sagacious he was, was apt to retain it in a stronger degree. The shortest, easiest and perhaps best account of the general prevalence of this truth is, that it made a part of the divine revelation to our first Progenitor, was handed down by tradition from him, and revived and strengthened by occasional repetitions from the original source in different periods of the world, till at length the great Author of our Religion fully insisted upon, and sufficiently unfolded it, declaring expressly that there was to be hereafter a state of endless and perfect happiness or misery, and making these the chief and express sanctions of all his Laws. To Beings therefore of such constitution and expectations, the desire of possessing this greatest good, and in consequence of escaping this greatest evil, ought in all reason to be supreme, and take the first place in their minds, and if these last were but moderately replenished with the true religious fear, it would do so. For as the Deity is the sole absolute Lord and Disposer of this grand event, if Men did but properly fear him in that view, they would be naturally led to be more attentive to, and meditate more upon it, than it is to be suspected many do, who make a formal profession of the belief of it. They would be apt frequently to revolve it over with themselves, and set it in a variety of strong points of light, such as it's importance might admit and deserve; and by such repeated exercises they would strengthen and increase their desire after  
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it to that height, as would give it the chief ascendant in their breasts: and when they have arrived at this disposition, this will in its turn serve to prove to them, that thus far they are possessed of that genuine fear of the Deity, to which the promise is annexed, and therefore may in proportion confidently look for the completion of this their most important desire from him, as from a faithful Creator.

But however, that this Desire, so truly laudable in itself, may not, by our mismanagement of it, turn out a mere heat of Enthusiasm, without any legitimate and solid foundation to rest upon, it will be proper that to our Faith in this respect we add the desire of virtue also, as subservient to the former, since this is the only path of God's appointment, by which we can, in our present state, regularly arrive at heaven. It may indeed be said, and it is to be feared, that many, whatever they may say, are but too apt to think, that as virtue is the regulation of our own actions according to our best reason in any given circumstances, the possession of it must be always in our own power, and therefore it must be absurd to exert any desires about it; and from hence perhaps it is, that like other things which men are in full possession of, the exercise and enjoyment of it is neglected by them, whilst their thoughts and inclinations are totally taken up with other objects. But however, this is a partial, and may be a very erroneous state of the case: — for although Virtue is, in some sense, in our own power, since nothing can compel us to be vir-  
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tuous whether we will or not, yet we cannot always of ourselves come up to the established standard of real Virtue, when we please ; and although we may do in any or every supposed case what we think best, yet it will not therefore follow that we do virtuously : for this may after a manner be affirmed of every man, as well the wicked as the righteous, since each Person acts according to the best of his present judgment, for otherwise he would chuse evil, as such, which we all know is impossible. — The truth of the matter and the misfortune is, that we are apt to be extremely careless in forming, and precipitate in making our judgments of things, and by a thoughtless continuance in this way, we contract habits of perverseness and depravity, — which will adhere to us, and not be shaken off at our pleasure ; and therefore our best judgment under such influence will probably be a very bad one, and in consequence so will the conduct that flows from it. Add to all this, — that fatal experience discovers to us a strange, although I will not say entirely unaccountable Bias, by which we are carried almost mechanically towards wickedness, and which is continually obtruding its *better* or *stronger* even upon our *best* judgments ; so that we must be obliged to say in the language of St. Paul, — *although we delight in the law of God, after the inward man : yet we see another law in our members, warring against the law of our minds, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin, which is in our members.* (Rom. Chap. 7. ver. 22, 23.)

22, 23.) From this view of things then it must appear, that human virtue ought to be considered rather as an absent or precarious good, than one which we have a firm and lasting possession of, and therefore our desires may be very properly exerted either for the acquisition of it, or for its preservation.

As then God himself hath assured us, that without a virtuous holiness no man shall see him, so as to receive the fullness of joy from his presence, certainly if we are in any degree properly actuated by the dread of his displeasure, we must form a hearty desire after that virtue which is to free us from it, and is moreover to be the Passport for our entrance into that Region, where our victory over sin, the world and the devil will be complete, and our Faith be swallowed up in Fruition. We shall from hence be led not only to exert our most strenuous endeavours against every vicious habit, but even be cautious of the distant approaches to the confines of wickedness. We shall also be extremely sensible of that continued propensity or weight, which hangs upon the moral part of our nature, giving us an almost constant inclination to what is wrong, and we shall be excited to have recourse to the most proper counterpoize for this and every other spiritual weakness, I mean, the Gift and Graces of God's holy Spirit. From hence to the paying a frequent and conscientious attendance upon those duties, which are the established means of conveying this assistance, is an easy step; and as by such  
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behaviour, we shall have taken the very best, because it is God's own appointed method, for the possession, security, and improvement of every Virtue, so we may with a modest confidence hope in due time to reap the great and final recompense of it.

After the genuine Fear of God hath thus regulated, and confirm'd these first and grand desires of the mind, and hath made all suitable provision for their completion, by pointing out the only sure way to obtain what, in comparative language, is the one thing needful; it may be proper to reflect, (which indeed all of us are but too ready to do,) that we have bodies as well as souls, and are pretty strongly sollicitated with cares for their support and accommodation. Now these we may not only lawfully encourage, but it is our Duty to do so to a certain degree: there are things which are indispensably necessary for the very support of our Being, and which we must have or die: there are comforts and conveniencies of life indulged with no other apparent intention, but that they should be enjoyed by some people, and therefore each one, at proper seasons and under certain restrictions, may use, that can fairly obtain them: — Examples likewise almost daily occur, which prove that the circumstances of individuals are not so fixed either for the better or for the worse, as to admit of no diminution or advantage, and each Person may very allowably avail himself of the opportunities, which offer, of guarding against the one, and applying

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ing the other, provided he can do either without any real injury to the more just and well-grounded pretensions of others. Thus far, I fancy, we are all agreed, but it is incumbent upon me to maintain a point, which will not perhaps be so readily admitted; for I am to shew that the due reverence of the Deity is in general one of the most effectual means for all these desirable ends: and yet this is a very beaten topic too, which men frequently hear of from such places as these, and to appearance readily acquiesce in, but they depart, they almost totally neglect the advice given, and, nevertheless, they often prove successful in life, so that one would be tempted to suspect, that they had no tolerable conviction of it upon their minds.

However be that as it may, the assertion, as founded in the nature and reason of things, may be supported with very great truth, as far as I am concerned with it. For let us consider, (what I have already insisted a little upon,) that the genuine Fear of God directly leads to the conscientious practice of all the moral virtues, and amongst these we know that Sobriety, Industry, Prudence and Honesty take their rank; all of which have a strong natural tendency to promote even temporal success. For is not Sobriety allow'd by almost every one to be the usual and best preservative of health, and does it not conduce much (partly in consequence of this) to maintain an integrity and clearness of the Understanding, whatever that may be in each Individual? — What is Industry but  
a patient

a patient submission and application of the powers of body or mind, or both, to Objects which will admit of alteration and improvement, and from thence be accommodated to the uses of life, by such an exertion ; and will not the Artist be in consequence justly intitled to the rewards of his Labour from those, who may reap the benefits of it? — Will not Prudence teach him the right employment of the fruits of his toil for the best advantage of himself and those connected with him? and will not Honesty for the most part maintain his reputation, and by that means furnish materials and opportunities for the exercise of his Industry? — From this short and easy deduction then we may see, that these virtues are a sort of first Principles in the science of this present Life, upon which we must proceed, if we would act regularly and upon a proper and solid foundation. It is true a variety of external causes must concur with our best endeavours, and which are often in a good measure independant of them ; but doubtless experience will testify, that the divine Providence very frequently, in these cases, so far gives its blessing, that all circumstances shall work together for even the temporal good of them, who thus fear him. However Experience will likewise shew us several exceptions to this from the examples of those, who have served the Lord with reverence and godly fear, and have, in consequence of it, performed every moral Duty to the best of their power, and yet have met with no reward of their labour, unless ill success and mi-



fery may be called so; whilst we may on the other hand discern many sons of fortune, who, without almost any merit or virtue whatever, have entered into the present rewards of both. But these last, I fancy, upon a more deliberate survey, and the taking in of all circumstances, will fall very much short of that multitude, which a sanguine and precipitate imagination would represent them to be, somewhat like the stars in the firmament, which to a common eye, or a cursory observer appear innumerable, but upon a more accurate, attentive, and philosophic view, all, that we are at present acquainted with, are declared far from being so: and as to the former, although I fear they are more in number, yet, both together taken, they are not to be compared to those, who are in fact, or might have been prosperous, in the common sense of the word, by the due cultivation and exercise of the great Duty now before us. — Add to all this that the Person who pursues the goods of this world, with a conscientious fear of God upon his mind, and according to the divine directions, will have much more moderate desires towards them, than those, who make them their supreme or chief good, and will, from that circumstance, be better qualified to receive all the gratification, which they can rationally be expected to yield, and also feel much less pain from any disappointment of them. — When therefore these various considerations are taken together and drawn to a point, they will, I apprehend, authorize me to say, that a genuine Fear of God is one of the  
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most effectual means for the fulfilling our desires, after temporal success, and that we may have very sufficient inducement to maintain and encourage it simply from that motive.

Once more and I have done. — As then the genuine Fear of God is well adapted to gratify the pursuits of Individuals after their own private advantage, in this life, so likewise we may see by a very clear deduction, that it is naturally calculated too at once to inspire and gratify a desire for the good and prosperity of our Country. By which last word I mean, (as I question not but you will readily imagine) not merely the spot of earth which we happen to inhabit, but also that Collection of Laws, ecclesiastical and civil, which join and bind us together in one community. Now we know, He who truly feareth God will be led from thence duly to cultivate the great duty of gratitude towards Benefactors; but a very little reflexion is necessary to shew us, that all, which we *do*, or *might*, (except for our misconduct,) have enjoyed above the condition of the simple, naked Savage, is to be ascribed almost entirely, under God, to our Country: which by securing the life and the fruits of industry to our Parents, or their inheritance, (which, it is most probable, was originally the fruits of industry somewhere,) hath enabled them to exert an effectual care for our nurture and education, when we could do nothing, or not much of that kind for ourselves; and all the security to those means of support and comfort, which we may since have acquired  
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in our own persons, or have received from our Parents, or their Substitutes (who, as far as the present point is concerned, may be said to stand in the same relation to us,) I say, all this must be placed to the benign operation of the same cause; if therefore we have the proper fear of God before our eyes, we shall sincerely and heartily wish for the reputation and real advantage of the community to which we belong, in the light of gratitude to our great Benefactor, which duty either expressly or at least by most plain implication makes a very material branch of the divine Law. — It is true the higher any Person is in rank, and the greater the property is, which he possesses, the stronger in reason ought his acknowledgments to be to that government which preserves both one and the other to him; yet all its Members, (especially under such a happy constitution, as ours,) are, for the most part, settled by it in a state so much superior to that of mere nature, and, if they are born under it, it must of course have been so far before hand with them, have acquired such an interest in, and have laid such obligations upon them, as, after they are come to years of maturity, they can scarce ever sufficiently repay; and therefore this bond of gratitude to advance its prosperity to the utmost of our power can never, in the ordinary course of things, be entirely cancelled: consequently, if we are to a due degree replenished with the genuine fear of God, we shall upon all proper occasions feel and exert this desire.

Let us now see how this same Principle conduces



duces to gratify the desire, which it is thus calculated to excite. I have just already pointed out, in a slight and perfunctory manner, some moral virtues, as examples to shew, how aptly conducive they are to even the temporal success of each individual Agent, and I must here add that the whole circle of duties hath the like tendency to the good of the Community in general. To support this last assertion by entering into a full detail of particulars, would be, in effect, to write an answer to the famous maxim, advanced by its noted and infamous Patron, — that *private vices were public benefits*: but as there has been much more solid and sufficient replies given to it, than it seems to deserve, I shall from thence take it for granted at present, that this weak and infidel position is now entirely exploded. But if it be so, then from such a victory it is natural to think, that the opposite truth, that private virtues *are*, what he would make private vices to be, — *public benefits*, hath received a very great accession of strength, and may therefore be now looked upon, as most completely established.

However there is a trite observation which is to a certain degree so very just, and so apposite to the purpose now before us, that I cannot tell how to pass it by entirely unregarded; — it is no more than this, that as national Societies or Kingdoms have their existence, as such, only in this world, so they are to expect their rewards and punishments only here. Now if this be the case, the argument or motive for each Person's being virtuous, taken from the present temporal advan-



advantage, which will probably accrue to himself from such conduct, must be much more cogent when applied to the State of which he is a Member: for, in respect of private virtue, if we at any time see it taking it's final leave of this earthly scene of things, utterly neglected, or actually oppressed from almost every quarter, we have a ready and pertinent answer to give for such an appearance, we can say, that temporal prosperity is not the *ultimate, supreme and necessary*, but only *the accidental and subordinate*, although *probable* reward of private virtue; whereas the disappointment of it in this life, may serve as a strong confirmation to us of it's happiness, and perhaps to the real improvement of that happiness hereafter; but as, taking the truth of the proposition above for granted, no such subterfuge as this can be alledged in bar to the reward or punishment of the conduct of political Societies, or Kingdoms here, considered in that capacity, so we may indispensably expect either one or the other from the Divine bounty or justice in this world, and in consequence we have a much stronger motive for the practice of virtue from the temporal prosperity, which will arise to our Country by means of it, than we can have from our own.

But that the cause of truth may not suffer by this argument's being set in a fuller point of light, or having more weight laid upon it, than it will bear, let us hearken a little to what may be alledged on the other side. For it may be said that in order to render such a procedure conformable

formable to our strict notion of Divine justice, the reward and the punishment of each People ought constantly to operate according to the prevalence of virtue and vice amongst them, and therefore it may very fitly be made a question, whether the Fact is really so, or not? — To this I must answer, that the intrinsic merit or demerit of Kingdoms consists of such multifarious particulars, and is so extremely complicated an affair, that it would be arrogance for almost any sagacity, beneath that of omniscient, to determine with precision upon it; consequently as it is most probable, that the Data or Principles will here be wanting, so we shall be very liable to error, if we attempt to make a stable and regular conclusion. God may execute his wrath upon a nation in appearance much better, than one, which He permitteth to escape without any signal mark of his displeasure, and yet this superiority may be fictitious, and *only* in appearance: He may even employ a more wicked People to be his instruments of vengeance upon one that is less so, and yet He may in due time give the former the full recompense of its deeds, by making the delayed ruin the more signal and tremendous: He may permit the perfidious villainy of some States to prosper and triumph against all opposition for a season, just as He does that of smaller Robbers, and with the same intent, that is, that He may set up both one and the other, as spectacles of destruction and terror to the present and future generations of men. These and a variety of such like cases might be put,



all tending to vindicate the proceedings of divine justice with earthly Kingdoms in this world : although it may be very difficult oftentimes for us to make the particular application of them, from the reason above given.

Instead therefore of too critically scanning, and with a supercilious air sitting, as it were, in judgment upon the ways of heaven in this respect, it would be a much more becoming and useful employment to have recourse to the antient Historians, especially the sacred, and to observe ourselves, or consult the most approved observers upon them, and see if the facts do not imply, and their reflexions declare, that wickedness hath been the general *providential* cause of the *ruin* of all those mighty Kingdoms, that are now no more, although very different might be the secondary powers, or the immediate instruments by which it was effected. If this then be the case, doubtless it may be very sufficient to form the most probable presumption upon it, that the like cause will continue to produce the like effect : and therefore if the genuine fear of God hath possessed us so far as to excite the just, and truly noble desire for our Country's Good and Prosperity, it will also naturally lead us to endeavour after universal virtue, as the most effectual means of divine appointment for this end; and we may humbly, but yet assuredly, hope for God's concurrence to it, provided the cause can be rendered, in a fitting degree, predominant.

This last Sentence readily carries me to make some application of what hath been said to the



occasion of the present Solemnity. We are now, to appearance, in the most serious and devout manner assembled to beg, with humiliation and prayer, a blessing upon his Majesties arms against our enemies, at a very awful and delicate Crisis. Such behaviour then, in such circumstances, is a good argument that we have the fear of God before our eyes, but in order to prove it genuine to to ourselves and others, it must produce all those desires in us, which I have endeavoured to shew that it is calculated, or rather indeed necessarily adapted to do, supposing it genuine; and these desires must upon all proper occasions excite us to suitable actions, and shine forth before men in all those good works, which constitute a holy and virtuous conversation; for it is only when they are thus circumstanced, that they come within the verge of the promise, made in the Text, and entitle us to their full completion from God, either in present or future happiness. — But further, — it seems almost indispensably requisite with regard to Kingdoms, that *numbers* should be virtuous, in order to qualify them rationally to expect such blessed effects of the Subject's virtue, as their prosperity and the continuance of it. Let no one therefore upon this occasion suppose himself in such a condition of insignificant obscurity, that, (provided he keeps clear of the censure of the law,) He may indulge himself in any vice, which he has a power to do; since his conduct, let it be either good or bad, must of course be too little to affect his Country in one way or another: for if he is low

and poor already, the regular consequence of such misbehaviour will be to render him at once a burthen, and a nuisance to that State, to which he belongs ; but if his circumstances and actions should not be so very bad, as to bring him to this, yet it is proper he should know, that the pious, sober, industrious, Tradesman, Labourer, and Mechanic are of the very utmost consequence to any community, and that although he may escape human correction, yet there is an Almighty and Omnipresent Being, who observes all his irregularities, and will add them to that mighty weight, which, if not timely prevented, will one day sink his Country into irretrievable ruin. — Again, — Let not any man, at the present juncture, be too civil and complaisant to the virtue of his neighbours : He may think (and it is a very natural thought to occur to the mind of a vitious Person, if He can be led to reflect at all upon the influence of his conduct, in respect to the Community,) that he sees many righteous men, in his opinion a multitude, very sufficient to guard off any danger, that heaven may threaten to inflict upon the society for the behaviour of him, and his brethren in iniquity. And it must be confessed, that, with respect to the influence of even a few righteous for the preserving a nation, there is something very plausible to be alleged from Holy Writ : for when righteous *Abraham* interceded for two wicked cities, we find, that, if there had been in them ten of the same character with himself, his petition would have been successful. However it is a most dangerous



gerous experiment to make tryal of, especially if many, (and one has as much right to do so, as another,) should strengthen themselves in their wickedness with an exprefs view to it. It must besides be considered, that, when the Father of the faithful became a supplicant at the throne of Grace for these People, it does not appear, that they were actually at variance with any of the neighbouring States, and therefore his prayer, as far as it was granted, was not done so in prejudice to any such. — But we have been, for some time, contending with our strongest and most virulent enemies, who doubtless have their day of humiliation, solemn address to heaven, and promises of amendment, as well as we: let then this hint contribute to inspire us with the genuine fear of our common Lord and Creator; let it excite a glorious emulation for the practice of all those virtues, which God hath enjoined to us; and let us endeavour, if possible (and if fame says true, it is not impossible) to surpass our opponents, in these chief foundations of security to all political Societies.

Upon the supposition, that these laudable effects shall be in any tolerable degree accomplished, there will be authority for me to speak some words of comfort in our present distress, and which our Antagonists cannot lay so proper a claim to. For we are bless'd with a Religion, happily reformed from all those childish follies, those palpable absurdities and errors, which their Profession of it groans under: we boast a Constitution in Church and State, established upon a  
system



system of the most equitable, and wise Laws, with a Guardian and Executor at the head of them, venerable by his years! venerable by his great justice, tenderness and humanity! venerable by every royal virtue! who is closely connected by blood, and now, it is to be hoped, by a firm alliance to a Hero, remarkable for his sufferings, his consummate wisdom, and his victories: our Fleets and Armies still retain the capacity, that they have all along had, to do that right to our cause, which it deserves, having suffered no defeat or loss, sufficient greatly to weaken, much less to render them impotent for any time; whilst a most puissant Body of our enemies forces are reported already very nearly to have found a grave, where they had acquired a territory, which last too, it is surmised, they are in a fair way of resigning again; whilst their trade, the grand mover in their unjustifiable usurpations and bloodshed, is languishing, and almost ready to expire from the very numerous captures of their Vessels. — If these Facts should prove to be truly stated, they will admonish us not to give way to impatience or despair, but to hope, that the mighty Governor of the Universe will condescend to give his blessing to those endeavours, which we still retain a full power of exerting, and will, in consequence of our having duly feared him, fulfill our desires, in this respect, by a lasting and honourable Peace.

Now to God the Father, &c.

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